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Thesis

on

Dysentery

By

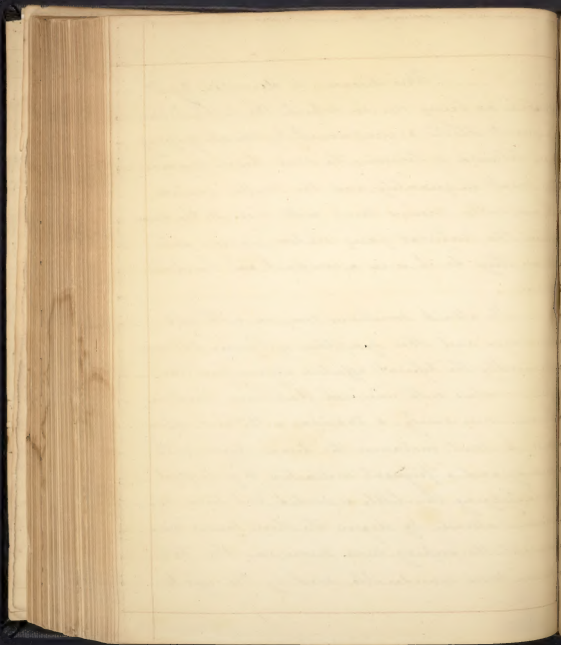
Joseph Shallerup

D 1826



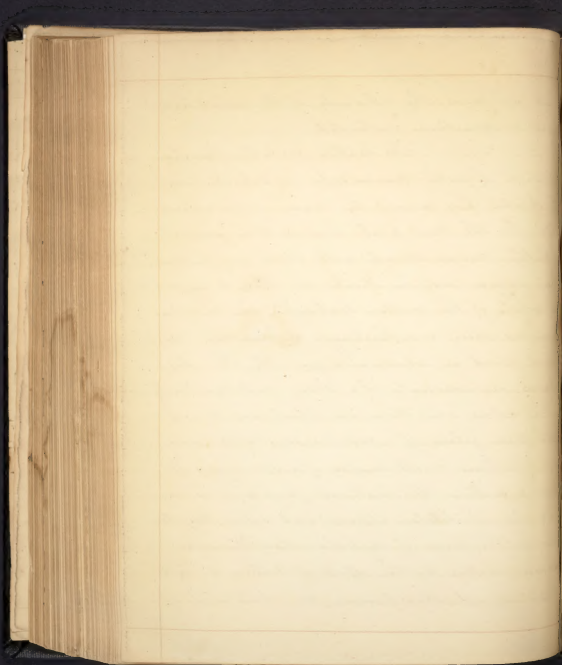
This disease is described by Dr Cullen, as being one in which the patient has frequent stools, accompanied by much griping, and followed by tenesmus, the stool, though frequent, are small in quantity, and the matter voided is generally mucus mixed with blood, at the same time, the natural faeces seldom appear and when they do it is in a compact and hardened form.

The attack sometimes comes on with cold shiverings, and other symptoms of Pyrexia, but more frequently the topical affection appears first, the belly is costive with unusual flatulence, sometimes though more rarely, a Dysentoea is the first appearance, In most instances the disease begins with griping, and a frequent inclination to go to stool, in indulging this little is voided, but some tenesmus attends, by degrees the stools become more frequent, the griping more severe, and the tenesmus more considerable, and by the efforts



which are made, the extremity of the intestinal canal is sometimes protruded.

The matter voided is sometimes composed of frothy mucus only, in which case the disease has received the name of *Dysenteria alba*. For the most part however, it is composed of frothy mucus mixed with blood, which sometimes appears only in streaks, at others, it tinges the whole of the matter discharged, and on some occasions, there is a discharge of pure and unmixed blood in considerable quantity. The discharges, are commonly of a strong and peculiarly fetid odour, and there are sometimes mixed with them, filons, of a membranous appearance, and sometimes small masses of a seemingly sebaceous nature. The natural faeces as was before observed seldom appear, and when they do it is in the form of scybala when these are voided, whether by the efforts of nature, or as solicited by art, they procure an abatement of

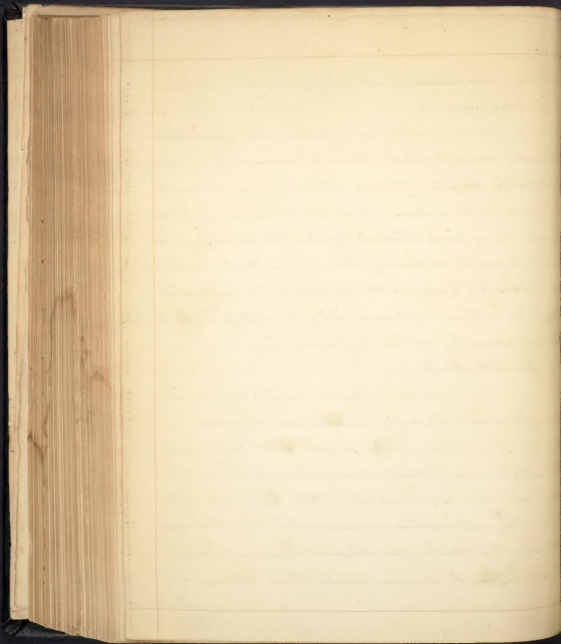


all the symptoms, particularly of the *Tormina*  
and *Tenesmus*.

Accompanying the symptoms  
already enumerated, there is commonly a con-  
siderable degree of fever, this has been so much  
the case as to induce some practitioners to denom-  
inate it a fever thrown upon the intestines. the  
fever may be either of the intermittent, remittent,  
or continued form, and when of the latter, it  
may be either inflammatory, or Typhoid. It is  
most frequently of the inflammatory kind in  
the United States.

The pulse is rarely full, or ac-  
tue, however tense or chorded it may be.

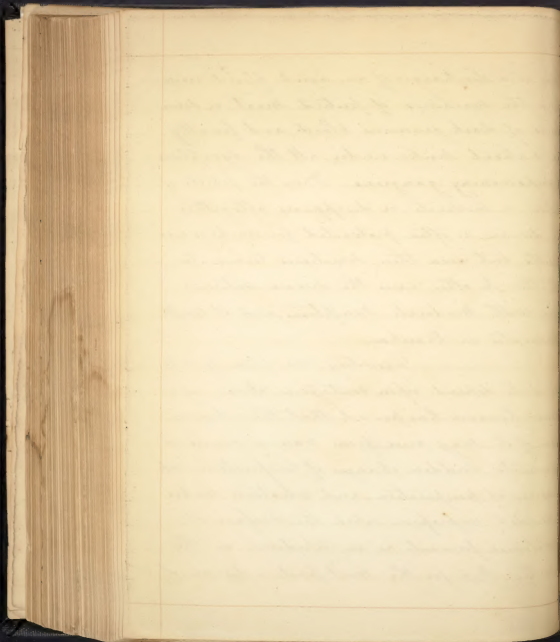
The disease not being ar-  
rested, there is a rapid diminution of strength,  
without any abatement of the painful affec-  
tions, the extremities become cold, the abdomen  
tensed, the pulse small, and frequent, and the  
Petechia, and vibices, make their appearance.





there is a discharge of an acrid fluid, resembling the washings of putrid meat, or sometimes of dark grumous blood, and finally the patient sinks, under all the symptoms of supervening gangrene. When the febrile affection is moderate, or disappears altogether, the disease is often protracted for weeks, or even months but even then, sometimes terminates fatally. In other cases the disease continues long with moderate symptoms, and at length terminates in Diarrhoea.

Dysentery was formerly supposed to depend upon contagion alone, experience however has proved, that the ordinary form of it may arise from various causes, as miasmata, sudden changes of temperature, suppression of perspiration, and whatever makes a decided impression upon the surface. It sometimes prevails as an Epidemic in this country, It is for the most part a disease of



the country, usually commencing at the end of summer and making its appearance in dry and elevated situations, and seldom if ever attacking the central parts of cities though it may appear in their environs which are exposed to noxious exhalations.

By dissection, it appears that this disease exerts its principal violence upon the larger intestines. This however is not uniformly the case, it is sometimes confined to the stomach, and small intestines, at least these are principally affected and when this occurs it is said that the Lymphatics and Lenses are slight, but that much gastric disorder exists, and there is acute and spasmodic pain.

The only disease with which this is liable to be confounded is the Acute form of Diarrhoea, and the treatment in both is so nearly the same as to render the mistake



of little importance. Rheumatism sometimes attacks the intestines, resembling this disease very much in its symptoms, as it may in most, if not in all instances however be traced to metastasis, the diagnosis will not be difficult.

In proportion as the disease is open and inflammatory it is more manageable but when the pulse suddenly sinks, the abdomen becomes tumid, the extremities cold, and there is discharged a fluid resembling greasy water, or the washings of putrid meat, of a cadaverous odour, or when dark mucous blood is discharged, we may apprehend great danger. discharges of blood or arterial blood, are comparatively of little importance. when the discharge consists of a dark green matter, attended by cold sweats, and Tachycardia and tetanic, make their appearance, with a ragged and distressed countenance, the utmost danger



is to be apprehended although recoveries are said to have taken place even after all these symptoms have occurred, instances are related in which recovery has taken place, even after Haemorrhaging of the Intestines to a considerable extent had occurred.

Blood letting in the commencement of this disease has been generally resorted to, to be efficient however it must be boldly employed, it is the practice of one who has experience entitles him to the utmost confidence, to take at least twenty ounces of blood at the first venesection, when this remedy is indicated, and if this should not afford the desired relief, to repeat the repeat it as often as circumstances may require it. Nor are we to be deterred from this practice by any apprehensions of the debility, which it may produce, for whatever this may be there can be no comparison between it, and that which follows the disorganizing





effects of disease, small bleedings on the contrary  
whilst they weaken the patient, make little or  
no impression on the disease. This remedy how-  
ever is only applicable to the first stages, or when  
the fever is considerable, with symptoms of an in-  
flammatory tendency.

Sydenham recommends the  
evacuation of the stomach by means of emetics  
and in certain cases, particularly those arising  
from miasmata, this will no doubt be found  
useful if not indispensable, except under  
these circumstances however I should not place  
much reliance upon them, or this, unless the  
Puracacantha is now commonly preferred, a  
mode of exhibiting it which was introduced  
I believe by Dr Haygarth of Bengal, and has  
acquired considerable reputation among the  
British practitioners, is to give the Puracacantha  
in doses of a drachm. combined with thirty or  
forty drops of Laudanum, confining the



patient to a horizontal position, and if vom-  
iting is excited repeating the dose. Dr Cullen  
observes that "if the emetics employed do not  
operate also by stool they are of little im-  
portance." Dr Bailey however in a note to his  
edition of Cullen's practice says "we have fre-  
quently found this article, Speeracj eminently  
useful in dysentery when being combined  
with opium it did not then in any degree  
its laxative operation. The Antimonials, do  
not appear to have gained so high a repu-  
tation in this disease as the Sp. acmācha,  
there is one of the preparations of Antimony  
however the cerated glass which has been  
much praised in some of the British journals

I resort to purgatives in order  
to clear the alimentary canal has been the  
usual practice, and its propriety is now I  
believe generally admitted, for this purpose  
the castor oil has commonly been resorted to



it should be given in large doses and even  
then as in all other cases where thorough e-  
vacuation is required it is infinitely inferior  
to the mercurials. Many other articles may be  
used with advantage, and Cullen indeed says  
that any laxative which produces an evac-  
uation of the natural faeces, and consequent  
remission of the symptoms, will be sufficient  
to effectuate a cure. It may not be improper  
however, to enumerate a few which have  
enjoyed the highest estimation. Cullen says  
if gentle laxatives should not produce the  
evacuation now mentioned, that of the nat-  
ural faeces, more powerful medicines must be  
employed, and I have found nothing more prop-  
er than the Tartar Emetic, given in small doses  
and at such intervals as determine it to act  
chiefly by Stool, Rheumat which was the  
favorite remedy of Sydenham, is pronounced  
by Cullen to be amongst the most empha-



ingulues: Gamlage has of late years ac-  
quired considerable reputation, and as it pos-  
sesses some hydragogue power, may probably  
in this way prove serviceable. I should be in-  
clined however to place far more confidence  
in the Calomel than in any of the preceding  
articles. might not the spirit of Turpentine  
by its antihelminthic as well as the peculiar  
power it possesses over inflamed mucous sur-  
faces prove highly useful in this disease.

Having thoroughly evacuated the  
intestines, the more powerful purgatives will  
then seldom be demanded, and we may next  
have recourse to the milder laxatives with  
much advantage, for this purpose the oleum  
Ricini may very properly be employed, by  
some practitioners the Neutral Salts are pre-  
ferred. I believe however the choice is not a  
very important one, and the dispute might  
perhaps be decided by the following lines





from the immortal Pope, with very little  
alteration of the first.

You shall or Mr. let declares contest

Which is best administered is best. Not  
a little of the uncertainty of medical science,  
I believe, might be traced to the indiscrimi-  
nate use of remedies in all states, and stages  
of disease which were probably only applicable  
to one.

Such difference of opinion has ex-  
isted as to the length to which purging should  
be carried in this disease, it is now however  
generally admitted, that it should be con-  
tinued until the natural forces are resto-  
red. It is necessary to bear in mind on the  
mean time that the unnatural discharges  
are the consequence of irritation acting upon  
upon the humors, and that the cause  
must be removed, or the effect will cease.  
For this purpose a violent to operate becomes



indispensable they should however never ex-  
ceed the employment of cathartics and  
there can be no necessity for their doing so  
as we may very advantageously combine them  
as we may purge during the day and exhibit  
an opiate with a diaphoretic at night.  
or if circumstances demand it an opiate  
may be united with the laxative and  
diaphoretic, thus fulfilling several valuable  
indications at the same time. Much ad-  
vantage has been derived from the Saccha-  
rum Saturni at this period of the disease  
Dr Chapman says that "evacuation by  
bleeding and purging having been pre-  
sented he has not found any thing so suc-  
cessful in checking Tremors and Incessant  
as this article. of its perfect safety there is  
not at present I believe the slightest doubt  
the muriate of soda, in the proportion of a  
tablespoon full to two or three of common



vinegar, is often eminently useful in fulfilling this indication.

Enemata may sometimes be used with advantage, when resorted to. They should be of the mildest kind, as fresh butter, lard, barley water, or flax seed tea. When there has been much excoriation of the Rectum, an opium pill introduced into it is said to afford much relief.

Purgatives are a very important part of the remedies in dysentery. Some practitioners indeed trust to them alone for its cure, and although this is running to an extreme, yet when bleeding and purging have been promised, much advantage may be expected from them. For this purpose the Dover powder may be given or what is better perhaps a combination of Calomel, opium, and Ipecacuanha, in proper



unctions, as an auxiliary means of inducing diaphoresis and relieving the griping when severe and frequent, warmth applied to the surface has been found greatly useful, this may be effected by means of the warm bath or warm fomentations to the abdomen. pediluvia will likewise be found useful, and a woolen roller applied round the whole trunk, has been said to afford much relief, it should be applied as tight as the patient's comfort will admit. This application has been used in diarrhoea with decided advantage.

Refracting applications are highly important, they may be applied either to the abdomen or extremities, but are most useful when applied as near as possible to the seat of the disease, some inconvenience may arise from their application to the abdomen, but this will





seldom be so great as to counterbalance their beneficial effects.

Much has been said of Mercurial Salivation, in this disease, it is seldom demanded in our country I believe, but when excited may no doubt be useful, if there be much hepatic disorder it becomes indispensable.

It remains now only to say a few words with regard to diet, this should be of the mildest and least irritating kind as Barley or rice water, Mucilage of Gum Arabic, flax seed tea, or a decoction of the bark of the *Ulmus americana*, or Sago or Tapioca, these were likewise supposed to be medicinally useful, there is not I believe however any foundation for such an opinion.

